Motor Racing / Vince Kowalick

Griffins' Hearts Set on Rally Races

Jeff Griffin really knows how to impress a date.

The first time Griffin took his girlfriend, Camille, for a practice run in the desert last year in his off-road rally car, Camille flipped head over heels.

But then so did Jeff.

"We rolled it," Griffin, 29, recalled with a laugh. "It was at night and I had to call some friends to rescue us. She said that I lied to her, that I go a lot faster than I told her I did."

After more than a year of marriage to Jeff and two off-road events this season, Camille Griffin, 27, who serves as her husband's navigator, still recalls the incident with a trace of fright.

"That was a very gentle roll," she said. "But it was really a shock. I got out of the car and grabbed the first person I could."

Funny how some of the most successful endeavors result from inauspicious beginnings.

Since they began rolling along in their Volvo 142, the Griffins, husband and wife, driver and navigator, have rallied to assume the points lead of the Sports Car Club of America's California Rally Series Open Class division.

Through two of the series' six events, Jeff and Camille, happily joined in off-road matrimony, are heading toward their first SCCA championship. The Tujunga residents placed first in the Indio Rally Stages in February and second in the San Andreas Stages in Lancaster in May.

And they're not planning to roll over in the points race.

Said Jeff: "At first, I'm not sure if she enjoyed it, or if she just did it because she knew I needed a navigator."

Added Camille: "I would say that if Jeff wasn't racing, I would probably be doing it with someone else."

The California Rally Series, created in 1976, consists of eight events (although two have been canceled) of off-road racing against the clock along desert paths in California, Arizona and Nevada.

"Rallies" are divided into "stages," in which a driver-navigator team bounces along the rugged off-road terrain, and "transits," in which competitors must obey all traffic laws. While in a stage. . . .

"You're on a road that you've never been on," Camille explained, "and then all of a sudden, you have to watch out for a cliff or something."

The navigator's job is to keep the driver informed of what lies ahead as indicated by a route chart and track markings. Calculation and execution is crucial.

"We were just flying at top speed one time," Camille recalled, "and there was a turn and it wasn't marked and we just flew off the road. We must have rolled three, four, five times and did pirouettes. And we were heading for trees and signs. It was quite scary."

But not enough to frighten either into retirement from rally events. The pair plan to compete in the Glen Helen Rally Cross in Devore, Calif., on July 29.

"I've had three navigators," Jeff said. "And she's the best one I've had."

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Car cornucopia: Rick Crow could open his own used car lot.

"Two cars that will be there [at Saugus Speedway] on Saturday, two cars with [roll] cages and rolling chassis and five cars that are just normal street cars that are ready to go," Crow said, cataloguing his nine vehicles.

Crow, a resident of Canyon Country, has languished in seventh place in the Street Stock division points standings at Saugus Speedway.

Crow has won two main events this season and the division's "pretty car" trophy, awarded on opening night to the driver with the most attractive car.

But after three months of slamming around the track, Crow's 1969 pink Chevelle was ready to be replaced—by a '68 model.

"The car was getting kind of, you know. . . . The body was kind of getting jagged around the end," Crow said.

When does Crow expect to need a new car?

"Probably next week," he said.

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Motocross: Third-round qualifying in the Coors/Kawasaki Summer Series continues tonight at Ventura Raceway where the one-fifth-mile dirt oval will be transformed into a mini motocross track complete with jumps, bumps and tight turns.

"It's kind of a mini stadium motocross track," track manager Cliff Morgan said.

Tonight's qualifying round is the third in a series of four leading to the Ventura County Fair Motocross on Aug. 18.

Four subdivisions of beginner, intermediate, amateur and professional will compete in six classes ranging from 80cc to 500cc. There also will be four-wheel vehicle competition and an over-30-year-old "veteran" class.

Riders must finish among the top 20 to qualify for the Fair. Twenty-eight trophies will be awarded.

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